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NOW AND THEN.

A Poem.

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A DISCURSIVE POEM:

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE YOUNG MEN'S INSTITUTE,

HARTFORD, FEB. 27TH, 1855.

BY

GEO. H. CLARK.

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NOW AND THEN.

My sight, bewildered, roams the crowded hall,
Where, like a mantle, silence seems to fall.
The stir is hushed. The rustling silks are still;
Rebellious boots obey their owner's will;
Bonnets, like forts, whose guns the bright eyes be,
Now aim, point-blank, their batteries at me;
And sterner eyes bear down upon my lips,
As icebergs grim encounter peaceful ships.

Expectant souls! Safe anchored here with Hope,
Stick to that anchor though it parts the rope!
Though surging rhymes and waves poetic swell,
Let Faith still cheer you with the cry 'all's well!'

Our later scribes the foregone eras class,
The Age of Gold, of Iron, and of Brass:
They now might add another florid page,
And stamp the present as the Lecturing age;
Unless, indeed, the simple fact may be,
That this comprises all the other three.
For he who puts his talents thus to nurse,
Extracts the Gold from our too willing purse;
His nerves must surely be of Iron made,
Who lives and prospers by the lecturing trade:
Thus of the bases I account for two—
Where lies the Brass, may be inferred by you!

The frequent feast before this audience spread,
By those who coin their learned brains for bread,
Or those who soar on 'Thought's expansive wings,
Crammed with the lore that large experience brings,
Are antecedents which might tempt my muse
Some lowlier opening for her flight to choose.

Delusive hope, for one like me, unknown,
To link my name with those so widely blown;
For me, unlettered, 'simple as I stand,'
To walk where strode the magnates of the land.
Your listening hearts have drank the honeyed tones

Of smooth-tongued wanderers from remotest zones;
Gigantic travelers, brimming with fresh news
From lands of Saracen, Japanese and Jews;
And quaint essayists, whose delight it is
To chase the wrinkles from each solemn phiz;
Poets, whose tones your tingling ears have filled
With sun-bright fancies from their brains distilled.
Wise politicians here have pitched their tents—
Lawyers have stooped to speak plain common sense;
Right Reverend Bishops and austere divines
Have scattered here the diamonds from their mines;
And one there was, who wore no gown nor cowl,
Would swallow nations as he would a fowl:
All Ireland he would bolt, and nothing loth,
Light as a bowl of Nora's chicken broth.

Thus Ancient Pistol, braggart to the core,
Vaunted his prowess in the days of yore;
The world he made an oyster—and his word
Was roundly pledged to open it with sword;
But the queer puzzle still eludes the view,
How he could well contrive the thing to do—
For if Earth's bivalve opened as he tells,
Where in creation would he throw the shells!

But let that pass—I've taken heart of grace,
And thus in public dare to show my face.
With threadbare tales I shall not bore your ears,
Nor try from you to squeeze unwilling tears.
Nor trail a story, length'ning to a mile,
With interlarding scenes to force a smile;
No complicated plot shall plague your brains,
Where startling scenes chase sentimental strains;
I bring no tear nor sigh-provoking tale,
With tender lovers woe-begone and pale—
Though broken hearts may happen now and then.
They have no charms for my repulsive pen;
But, like the bird confined to no one bower,
Let me with varying cates beguile the hour,
Hopeful, that when the evening task is through,
I shall have won approving smiles from you.

My subject, as you know, is Now and Then—
Times past, times present, things as well as men:
Close to the friendly shore my barque shall steer,
And only bring familiar features here:
While to prevent proclivity to sleep,
My lines shall drop in streams not over deep.

Our early home claims my attention first,
Where heart and soul and intellect were nursed;
Where the young stripling slid from scanty frocks
To manly pantaloons and downright knocks;
Where first we doubled up our infant fist,
And where, O where our earliest love was kissed;
Where the first blood we shed in Freedom's cause,
Came from rebellion to unwholesome laws.
For who so base among New England boys,
As pass 'the Fourth' without superfluous noise?
In spite of city laws guns will be fired,
For in their smoke our country's self was sired;
And every patriot, young or old, may rave
On Independence day. Long may it wave!

Ah me! what thoughts that theme prolific stirs—
Its pleasant memories stick by us like burs;
I travel back the turnpike road of life,
And tread once more those scenes of boyish strife:
I see the church, the school-house, and the green,
And shadowy forms of playmates flit between.
Where are they now—that well remembered band,
Who day by day clasped each the other's hand;
Where is the studious youth who shared my task,
And he who could mysterious sums unmask;

The boy who taught me where to read the stars,
And he who learned me how to smoke segars;
And that tall fellow with the wandering eye,
Whose honest look was a perpetual lie;
And he who charmed us in vacation times
With recitations of his own sweet rhymes;
And he to whom we all looked up with awe,
Because his sire was learned in the law;
And that strange bantling with the fiery head,
Of whom we stood in such continuous dread,
For that his father, stern and strong of limb,
Looked what he was—a constable so grim!
Where are they now? Grown up and scattered wide,
Where'er bold Progress rolls its surging tide.
One in Japan has gained a Yankee hold;
One in Australia gathers lumps of gold;
One builds in Africa a mission church,
And one in Georgia wields his native birch.
Some find hard work to get their daily bread,
Some are forgotten, some are with the dead;
While I, more favored, live and find the time,
From sterner tasks, to dabble thus in rhyme.

But let us leave this adolescent theme,
O'er which fond poets love to muse and dream;

Slide over days when sprouting whiskers threw
An air of manhood round our jovial crew,
And turn to sturdier and more thoughtful times.
The gleaming edge of our impulsive rhymes.
For he who crams with sentiment his verse,
May his own doings by himself rehearse ;
Of such trite themes the publishers are shy—
*They're passed unprinted, or unpurchased by,
And on the shelves, in stately rows erect,
Are left to mildew, cobweb and neglect.

Back beyond this our busy fancies run,
For life is older than our childhood's sun ;
Manhood not acts alone, but loves to think,
And life owes half its glow to printer's ink.
How circumscribed would be the realm of thought,
If all we know, or all we dreamed, was caught
In that small circle bounded by the span
That rounds the life, the experience of a man.
The exhaustless past contains a teeming mint,
Closed to our souls but for the aid of print :—
And yet the manuscripts of sages eld
The hidden germ within their folios held ;
What types and press and paper mills have wrought,
Are but the expansion of an earlier thought.

Thought grows from dreams to acts and living deeds,
Till on their ripened fruit the student feeds:
Art is the work of time—in homes unseen,
Strong, searching minds on greatest problems lean.
By patient toil a subtle fancy grew,
Till a new fact burst on creation's view,
And a slight wire, around an index curled,
Sent words, like lightning, pulsing round the world.
The seed that dropped in Fulton's ardent mind,
Sprang to a height that shadowed half mankind;
Nor shall the light of such a name grow dim,
Till the last strain of Time's funereal hymn.

With look averted, let us take the track
That leads the longings of the curious back,
To those grave times when our forefathers prayed
For strength and help their rugged toils to aid;
Who not alone on fervent prayers relied,
But fought like warriors, and like heroes died.
Their savage foe knew not 'effectual calling,'
But well they knew when leaden hail was falling;
Their faith was slight in sermons and good words,
But O 'twas strong in muskets and in swords;
The law was weak—a thing they heeded not,
But they believed in powder and in shot!

So, failing of conversion other ways,
The thoughtful men of those straight-forward days,
Brought carnal weapons to the work in hand,
And then the red man faded from the land.

I stood, of late, on Plymouth's famous rock,
And thought I felt the all peculiar shock,
Which that magnetic loadstone should impart
To every faithful, true-born Yankee heart;
I climbed the hill that overlooks the wave,
And musing stood on William Bradford's grave;
I trod the grass-grown plat where sleep the dead,
With reverent feelings and uncovered head.
I walked the village streets—how still they were!
The very railroad ends its being there.
I heard the distant sound of making nails—
And down the bay I saw the glittering sails,
Moveless and silent on the quiet flood,
Each sloop and schooner wallowing in the mud:
The tide was out—and every vessel lay
Self-anchored in the ooze that autumn day.
So while my long time cherished fancies fell,
I wandered, listless, back to my hotel.

But when the setting sun's last golden rays
Turned to bright amber all the gathering haze,
Again I lingered on that grave-crowned hill,
And my enthusiast soul then drank its fill.
The sunset glow merged into twilight dim,
And earth sent up its sweetest evening hymn:
Dull village sounds no more disturbed the ear,
But solemn silence filled the atmosphere:
The sleeping sea lay waveless at my feet,
A pilgrim's tombstone was my mossy seat;
A consecrated air seemed breathing round,
And all was sacred on that holy ground.
The graves of those brave sufferers met my sight,
And of the dames who shared their perilous flight:
Before me were the fields that they had tilled,
And the same spring where they their pitchers filled.
These met the eye. But Fancy sought for more.
And softly led me back to days of yore;
Imagination painted that stern band.
As first they stepped upon this wintry land:
I saw those hopeful men and their brave wives
Cast on this shore their fortunes and their lives,
While pinching hunger and the freezing cold
Laid their sharp fingers on the little fold.
They never quailed, those true and upright hearts,

Who came to plant religion and the arts;
They aimed to found an empire in the west,
Whose equal laws should shelter the oppressed;
FREEDOM was written on each manly brow—
And well they triumphed, and are deathless now!

Dear social souls! How well we love to trace
The haunts and homes of our ancestral race;
To people hills and plains and barren rocks,
With them, their children, and their feeding flocks.
Without their company, the musing mind
Amid such scenes but small delight would find;
They must be there, or we should not intrude
Within the silence of the solitude;
We feel their presence, though we see them not,
And the bleak hill becomes a hallowed spot.

Thus much for Plymouth. I could say no less,
And more, to-night, I hardly dare to press,
Lest you accuse me, in facetious tone,
With having kissed New England's blarney-stone.
Yet would our mission be but half complete,
Did we omit of kindred themes to treat;
So, from our eastern trip let us return,
And find what here, at home, we yet may learn.

Would you refresh your memories of that band,
Go visit yonder Hall.* There you may stand
Among the relics of an earlier day,
And give your antiquarian fancy play.
There Elder Brewster's chest unfolds its lids,
Beneath which lies—whate'er that fancy bids:
And there, at rest, is Captain Standish's pot.
Wherein he daily boiled—no matter what;
Whate'er it was, it nourished them of old,
And made the hearts of those gaunt pilgrims bold.
I miss one relic;—there should be the bed
On which Rose Standish laid her nightcapped head;
Perhaps the guardian of the Pilgrim Rock
May have it yet among his wondrous stock:
He shows, indeed, a heterogeneous hoard
Of antique lumber that the May Flower stored.

A silver flagon! Ah, that tells a tale,
Of cheerful hearts, and bodies strong and hale;
Did strength or courage flag? From this they quaffed,
And at the war-whoop of the Indian laughed;
'This strung their nerves' to brave and daring deeds,
As he may know who their old records reads;
There were no Carson leagues, nor Maine Laws then,

* Historical Society's Rooms.

In lack of which, they all were temperate men.
Pledged to the reason that their Maker gave,
No one became to low debauch a slave;
Yet when they dwelt on Plymouth's grassy bank,
They loved, they fought, they prayed, and eke they
drank.

On yonder shelf arranged with studious care,
Faded, and perfumed with an ancient air,
Repose the sermons of full many a saint,
Whose 'hand of write' was crabbed, small and quaint.
'The eyes of each old dignified divine
Were surely stronger and morẽ keen than mine.
For nothing short of microscopic art
To us their hidden mysteries can impart;
And even at times the question may arise,
Whether the value of the hoarded prize,
Lies not in knowing that one can not know
Whether the scraps be orthodox or no!

The leaden ball, swift messenger of woe,
Is there, that laid the noble Wooster low;
There is the vest by gallant Ledyard worn,
Whose treacherous death indignantly we mourn—
We see the rent through which his life-blood poured,

Where butcher Bloomfield plunged the yielded
sword.

There is the tavern sign, that swung of yore,
Beside brave Putnam's hospitable door;
Was its device some rustic painter's fun,
Or did young Israel really mean a pun?
For there, exposed to every traveler's view,
Is General Wolfe—but not the one he slew!
There, too, the Drum, that erst on Sundays fair,
With tones sonorous, called the crowd to prayer.
On other days for soldiers it might speak,
But 'drum ecclesiastic' once a week—
Belligerent no more, but vicegerent bell,
It bore good news where'er its summons fell.

To patriot hearts and antiquarian eyes
These homely things are each a cherished prize;
They are the subtle keys, that long shall last,
To open wide the storehouse of the past,
For round each symbol clusters many a scene,
Which serves to keep ancestral memories green.

And beggared currency has here a niche—
Showing wherein the elder race were rich;
A quaint display, outlandish, odd and strange.

From Alfred's coins to modern 'handy change;'
There, strings of wampum—money in their day—
Equal to some late promises to pay!
And quite as useful, all our hopes to mock,
As Western bonds, or Willimantic stock:
And silkiest bills on Biddle's slaughtered bank,
But O how fallen from their princely rank!
While Continental money, dead by vote,
Sleeps side by side with Daniel Webster's note!

Amidst this heap of rare and curious things,
Round which old Time his musty interest flings,
The one which first attracts the inquirer's eye,
Is him who points to where the others lie,
The faithful seneschal* who fills the chair,
And guards the precious store with jealous care.
Behold, and as you look, admire the guide,
Who clings so closely to the stranger's side:
The few thin hairs that hardly thatch his brow,
Are wintry white, and patriarchal now;
The eye that once with ardent fire was bright,
To know his friends, now needs an ample light;
His cheek is like a rose-leaf in the room,

* Dr. Robbins, the Librarian.

Where kindly age has left its youthful bloom ;
But ah ! his trembling limbs and feeble gait,
'Tell that his heirs have briefest time to wait.
The Doctor's dress no stylish art displays,
Unless it be the style of other days ;
The coat, that flings its van-like skirts abroad,
The antique boots, that well with him accord ;
The old blue cloak, the unpretending hat,
With brim worn bare, but lustrous for all that ;
The wide-rimmed specs, the gold-surmounted cane,
The brown umbrella, long inured to rain—
All seem to tell that we have here at last,
One living link that binds us to the past.

Sandwiched betwixt the past and present time,
Permit me here some slight descriptive rhyme ;
Compactly pressed, the interloping wile
Shall change the current but a breathing while.

Thus I take down from my poetic shelf
A fancy sketch of Fancy's fairy self ;
In lines more bold Imagination trace,
While sad-eyed Memory fills the closing space.
Three mythic maids, who here walk hand in hand,
To strew with poesy life's prosaic land.

Sweet Fancy loves to play with trifling themes,
And loves to revel in the land of dreams;
On every zephyr's breath her pinion stirs,
And earth, and air, and all the clouds are hers.
Her pictures rival, in their mystic wreaths,
Those which the sprite on winter windows breathes;
She floats on moonbeams, over fields of snow,
Which star-beams interlace with diamond glow;
When spangles glisten in the frosty air,
She's up and off to frolic with them there;
She loves the dreamy haze on autumn hills,
And loves the music of the singing rills;
She floats with sunbeams shimmering through the
trees,
And bends to hear the murmuring sound of bees;
She loves all quiet beauties and sweet sounds,
As on light wing she goes her airy rounds.

The phosphorescent glow, like flashing steel,
That following foams around the parting keel;
Celestial rainbows, circling after storms,
The crimson flush their wrestling clouds that warms;
The songs of birds that meet the blushing morn,
The dewy rain of summer evening born,
The booming melody of far-off bells,

Whose undulations throb along the dells ;
The insect hum that stirs the drowsy noon,
The new-mown hay of aromatic June :
The apple blossoms, and the bursting rose,
The odor-laden breeze that through them blows—
O'er these her charming influence Fancy flings,
And waves in dallying wantonness her wings.
Hers is a realm of unalloyed delight,
Radiant with beauty, and with star-gems bright ;
The sparkling dome enroofs her ample hall,
And where Thought radiates, there she haloes all.

Imagination takes a broader sweep,
A wider circle, and a bolder leap :
She loves the seething ocean's crag-piled shore,
With its wild grandeur and perpetual roar ;
To laugh among its breakers, and to ride
Its crested surges and its rampant tide ;
While its great tones, upheaving and elate,
Seem kindred voices calling to its mate.
The hollow moan of struggling mountain floods,
The fierce winds battling with the crashing woods ;
The storm-king bursting from his awful throne,
With eyes of lightning, and with thunder tone :—

Where'er roused Nature shows her mighty power,
Imagination there will proudly tower.

She springs exultant in her upward flight,
And plumes her way o'er many a giddy height;
When her imperial pinions mount the gale,
'Thought, quivering, leaps, to follow on the trail.
Through fields of light, beyond the bending blue,
Her winnowing wings allure the heavenly dew;
When startled Reason flings to her the helm,
Worlds are her kingdom, space her subject realm;
Down the long vista of the coming years,
On victor wing her steady way she steers,
Reads there events, as prophets read of yore,
And rides triumphant through the misty frore.
No hurtling clouds, nor blinding storms of hail,
Can make her strained and flashing eyeballs quail—
Above, beyond the lazy course of time,
She holds her way, majestic and sublime!

And Memory has her triumphs, and her trials,
As she turns back the hands upon the dials;
Strikes chords that give a long forgotten tone,
And claims the Past, dominion of her own.
All there is hers—the overpeopled past,

Where sleep dead hopes, our earliest and our last;
She calls at will our youthful longings up,
Fills to the brim Remorse's wormwood cup,
Strikes the wild string that Passion could not
break,

Till its remembered tones once more awake;
'Touches the spring that lends to young desires,
And once again they thrill along the wires;
Lifts the dark curtain that enfolds young Love,
And purpling sunbeams gild it from above.
Full to o'erflowing is her wide domain,
Where awful silence and pale sorrow reign;
'Tomb of lost joys, and sepulchre of hopes,
'Mid which the aching soul bewildered gropes;
Faith, Hope and Love against the portal lean,
While one lone Phantom stalks across the scene.
Down the dim aisles, and o'er the crumbling walls,
No starry beam, nor ray of sunlight falls;
Impending clouds shut down from overhead,
And wrap in gloom that region of the dead!

Well, let Imagination heavenward sail,
And Memory enter with a visage pale;
Let Fancy come to charm the twilight hour—
All have their missions and their times of power.

Through dreamy realms Thought's messenger may
 roam,

But the true heart turns fondly to its home!

Ah, at the mention of that cherished word,

What answering tones are in the bosom stirred;

Though other scenes may charm with gifts more rare,

The soul's enjoyment springs and centres there!

I love my fireside—or at least I did,

Until behind a register 'twas hid!

I loved the chimney corner, and the blaze

Of hickory logs, in those dear palmy days:

But with a feeling near akin to hate,

I look on yonder innovating grate;

The modern register's more hopeless yet,

With its grim visor and its bars of jet;

Its jaws emit a strong sulphureous heat,

The insulted lungs abhor whenever they meet.

The cheerful blaze, the ample hearth we miss.

And find instead, contrivances like this!

And yet so long as men have careful wives,

They must submit, or live unquiet lives.

Shut up your fires—burn gas instead of oil—

Let your beefsteaks on reeking ranges broil—

Toast your cold feet before the heated air,

That puffs its venom through twelve inches square :
Resign all comforts with a cheerful laugh,
Although thereby your days are shortened half :
Do any thing—submit to any claims,
That most may please or gratify your dames.

Yet all these wretched arts of modern change,
From its loved home can not the heart estrange,
We love the quiet that the evening brings,
We love the very song the kettle sings ;
We love our books—those dear delightful friends,
And all the comfort their perusal lends.
And then our cheerful paintings all are there—
Familiar things—how well their faces wear !
We're not perplexed to choose among the few,
For, though the same, to us they're always new.

The fairy flowers that ornament the room,
More cheerful there than in the garden bloom ;
Their fragrance never satiates nor palls,
Nor on the passing stranger idly falls.
We know our flowers—we've known and loved
 them well,
Since the first day their buds began to swell ;
We've watched their fair existence, bright but brief,

As they unfolded each perfected leaf;
In sweet solicitude their dawning nursed,
And into beauteous being saw them burst,
Till now, behold, each fair and slender stem
Upholds a star, a crown, a perfumed gem!

Ah yes! although there's no domestic hearth,
Home has its pleasures and its genial mirth;
The daily toil, with all its fret and foam,
Dissolves and fades as one approaches home.
You meet your wife—perhaps your infant heir;
One welcome smiles—the other pulls your hair!
Which pleases you the most? Ah, happy sire,
Here's joy enough without the tabooed fire.
Away with grumbling—hither comes the boy,
This only's wanting to complete your joy.
The young rogue leaps upon your waiting knee,
And claps his hands, and crows with noisy glee;
The welcome kiss that met you at the door,
Was but the prelude to a hundred more;
Who now is happiest? Father, boy, or wife,
In this the culminated hour of life!

Remove the magic slide. Your moistened eye
Beholds the sad funereal train pass by;

'The mother, sobbing with a broken heart,
'The father, silent, tearless and apart,
But hopeless, childless, and in mute despair,
His heart lies confined with the lost one there.
No more to them the radiant child is given.
They dwell alone, and dream of him in Heaven:
Existence is a blank—Life's light is dim,
And all worth living for expired with him.

Rash pen, betrayed by this forbidden strain,
Wheel lightly round into the path again:
Our promised pleasure we shall surely miss,
If turned aside by saddening themes like this.
Let me once more, on my accustomed track,
Bound like a harlequin to the footlights back:
Resume the motley with its cap and bells.
'Till on the ear their joyous cadence swells.

Amid the themes my busy brain that throng,
One here demands a foothold in my song:
Fit theme my rambling melody to crown,
Would be the young life of our goodly town.
Suggestive hint! My nervous fingers glow
To tell in rhyme of all I feel and know;
Its past is full of stirring deeds and thought,

With poet subjects and rich fancies fraught :
The reins are strong that hold my rampant steed—
On such a course he pants to show his speed ;
Impatient paws the ground, and champs the bit,
While his excited rider shares the fit.
But I refrain—nor dare intrusive tread
In that bright field with loftier trophies spread ;
For the poor gleaner, following Scæva's track,
Would surely come most empty-handed back.

And yon fair river, wimpling by our doors,
Rich with the legendary flood it pours,
How should I love its countless charms to sing,
And o'er its wave a graceful idyl fling ;
Track its green banks, the startled echoes wake,
From Saybrook bar to its bright parent lake :
Thread its primeval forests of vast pines,
On whose tall heads the northern sunlight shines ;
Rush with its waters down the sounding rocks,
Or skirt its meadows filled with pastoral flocks ;
Anchor my boat within the eddying pool,
And stray, enchanted, in its grottos cool—
For many such there be, that gem its edge,
By pendent trees and legend-haunted ledge.
But I forbear—nor dare to enter here,

To share the laurels with a name most dear;
My lowly muse stays her presumptuous flight,
Where Brainard's genius left its trail of light!

One opening's left me—one poor local theme—
Yon rueful, meagre, tributary stream!
Nameless to most, although at times it claims
A lovely trio of euphonious names.
'Tis Little River—Hog—or Sickinam,
And hardly worth an interrupting dam;
Yet do its falls that dear distinction gain,
And sometimes otherwheres—from men profane!

There have been trials, weak as well as strong,
To lift the simple streamlet into song;
Attempts to dignify its banks forlorn,
And with a wreath its forehead to adorn;
But signal were the failures—and no bard
But turns discomfited from theme so hard.
Our own fair poetess has tried to throw
Round its unloveliness a classic glow,
But even *her* powers could not the task achieve,
And, from its charms, a garland failed to weave.

In early spring it pours a turbid flood,
Rich with the gatherings of elastic mud;
In summer, dwindling to a sickly thread,
Its shallow pools exhale musketoes dread;
There tadpoles breed—and there melodious frogs
Orchestral music pipe from fungused logs.

Well, let it pass—a still unwritten stream,
O'er which no poet ever hopes to dream;
Leave it to lead, so far as rhyming goes,
A quiet life of undisturbed repose—
'Twere better far to steal along incog,
Than live exultant in the name of Hog!

A few brief moments let my pencil play
Around one strange delusion of the day,
Which, with its leaders, stands in bold relief,
Of all deliberate humbugs reigning chief.
So strong its grasp upon the willing mind,
We strive in vain its hundred arms to bind:—
So brazen-faced the rank imposture shines,
That it demands a few indignant lines.

At bearded 'circles' it is ghostly talk—
Makes tables travel, and the poker walk;

Like hats, it glories in a soothing nap,
And, like the postman, enters with a rap.
Its many names the public have by heart—
Call it Psychology, or Mesmeric art,
Black art or Magic, Thaumaturgy wild,
Biology, Enchantment, Madness' child;
Clairvoyance, Sortilege, or Second Sight,
Or any name fair Common Sense to fright;
Witchcraft, or Sorcery, Theurgy, or plot
Of Hocus Pocus. Reason it is not.
Let it adopt all synonyms in course,
From Spirit Rappings to Odylic force—
Baptize the creature by what name you will,
Its patronymic will be Humbug still!

The witch of Endor, if she could arise
And visit us, would stare with open eyes,
'To find her skill, once narrowly confined,
Now floating freely as the march of mind.
'Try your next neighbor—'pass' him into sleep,
And you have messages from Pluto cheap;
Abram or Shakspeare, Junius or Joyce Heth,
Speak at your bidding from the realm of death.
Call, if you like, the ghost of father Adam,
Or Eve herself, before she was a madam,

And they, or else the science is a libel,
Will straight authenticate or damn the Bible.

In sober earnest, or by way of fun,
Call on your ancestors—'tis often done.
Waked up from their unconscionable doze,
On eager ears their knockings they impose;
Tell you how old your aunt was, when she died,
Her Christian name, and when she was a bride;
Spell out the number of the boys she bore—
All which you know, or might have known, before.
The past is plain—but as for time to come,
You might as well consult a muffled drum.

But one great trouble which adepts have got,
Is doubt if their reports be true or not;
'The unstrung mediums never yet have found
If they're on holy or blasphemous ground,
And still they swear the information true,
Which they bring up from Hades unto you.
Oh impious soul! To thrust your addled head
Where only angels are allowed to tread!

The road they're traveling ends in misty night,
Where no blest guide-board stands to set them right;

The only taverns on that dreary way,
Where they their crazed and aching heads can lay,
Are structures furnished by the State at large,
Who take, at last, the moonstruck fools in charge.
'They're dropping in by such increasing scores,
That every keeper soon must close his doors,
Unless the State, to stay the rush awhile,
Builds its asylums once in every mile.
We want some Dr. Johnson on our coast,
To exorcise this modern Cock Lane ghost.

One ticklish subject let me lightly touch,
That just now troubles some folks overmuch.
Dear Woman—bless her heart! has lately found
That man, the rogue, has trespassed on her ground:
Somehow the twist has got into her mind,
That some great evil—vast, but undefined—
Is now impending o'er the gentle sex,
Her simple soul to harass and perplex;
But, though conventions still are all the go,
Where that great evil lies, none seem to know.
Where the end is of all their rightful powers,
Or the dividing line that marks from ours,
Would puzzle wisest craniums to divine—
My own belief is, there is no such line.

What's hers's her own; what's ours belongs to her,
And she can have it all without this stir.
We live, we act, obedient to her sway,
And soon or late she always has her way;
Thence comes my fear that she will have it now—
The only doubt is, as to when and how.

But if you preach, so should you till our farms—
If you will vote, you ought to shoulder arms;
Dress, if you please, in trowsers like the Turk,
But, for your own sake, don't begrudge our work.

Perhaps some shrewd inventive-Yankee mind
A new contrivance, or machine may find,
Whereby fond woman may obtain her rights,
And leave poor man in peace to wear the tights!

Enough of this, my all too frolic Muse—
Some ground less dangerous for your antics choose;
Let no light reason charm your airy feet
Beyond the limits of the sentry's beat;
It is a risk we hardly dare afford,
That brings to ladies' lips a pouting word:—
Edge gently off, and quietly renew
Our earlier strain, now partly hid from view;

The past, the present, and the coming time,
Must meet and mingle in our closing rhyme,

In that prim city, by fair Schuylkill's side,
Miscalled of Love, more truthfully of Pride,
Where broad-brimmed hats and coats of sober hue
Proclaim, like flags, that virtue's here on view;
Where ostentation dwells in plainest walls,
And subtle speech in blindest accents falls:
In that square city stands an ancient Hall,
Its stones defaced with many a witless scrawl,
Grown old and rusty, yet in form the same
As when it held those fearless sons of fame,
Who there threw down the battle gage to kings,
And loosed the bands that bound fair Freedom's
wings.

'That hall is now a pilgrim shrine for men,
A theme for poet's and for history's pen,—
'There was accomplished that world-famous deed
Which overshadows England's Runnymede.
For why? 'Those barons, whom we term the bold,
Forced from their king a pledge, in days of old:—
'Those haughty nobles, savage, fierce and proud,
Claimed half their rights, and had their claim allowed.
Our sires demanded all! No boon they craved,

But king and parliament they dauntless braved;
They knew their rights, and no resistance feared,
But dared Britannia's monster to the beard;
With no weak truckling for a compromise,
They stretched their hands and rudely grasped the
prize;
Their cry for FREEDOM thundered on the gale—
And we have got it on the largest scale!

And Liberty, long deemed a sort of myth,
Turns out to be a child of nerve and pith;
Upon our wave-washed shores she stands complete,
And finds an empire stretching to her feet.
Her ladyship's indeed a noble queen,
Of frankest bearing, and of friendliest mien:
To all true friends protection she will yield,
Behind her bright impenetrable shield.

With brain and hand man here is free to act,
And fabled Freedom's an established fact.
Should any doubt the truth of what I say,
Go join the gathering on Election day:
There you may hear and see, perchance may feel,
With what fine unction and exceeding zeal,
Each sovereign voter will assert his claim

To more of Independence than the name.
Ask him which ticket he intends to vote,
And well his prompt and ready answer note;
Suggest that possibly he may be wrong,
You but confirm him in his faith more strong:
Adduce your proof—he's ready for the fight,
And still maintains he is, and must be right.
Assert his ignorance, and the retort
Comes flying back, with double ardor fraught.
He knows what he's about, and tells you so—
And tells which ticket he intends to 'go.'
Knows what majority his man will get,
And backs his firm conviction with—a bet!
He casts his ballot with an air of pride,
Sure he has voted on the strongest side;
But right or wrong, in victory or defeat,
On one great point his triumph is complete—
He votes to please himself—and always will,
Though that same vote his brother's chance should
kill.

But should the candidate his trust betray,
He's a marked man, and surely gets his pay;
Even grave senators, by interest led,
For one false step their cherished plumes must shed,

And, like the globe in vacant space that rolls,
Are, by gyrating, flattened at the polls!

Not only have we earned fair Freedom's boon,
But trust that all will join our standard soon:
Our eagle banner, to the winds unfurled,
We mean shall claim the homage of the world;
Already have we made a goodly stride,
Though much the largest half remains outside;
But in due time their warning they will get,
And all the slumbering nations join us yet:—
Monarchs must stoop, and bend the subject knee,
And all mankind—save niggers—shall be free!

With eye prophetic I behold the time
When our star flag shall wave in every clime:—
Japan is coming—and the Sandwich Isles
Await the moment with propitious smiles;
The fair Antilles beckon us for aid
With all the ardor of a Spanish maid;
A few more revolutions, and the Gaul
For help and succor upon us will call;
And Africa awaits, with outstretched arms,
To fling before us all her yielding charms;
China comes next—we want our cup of tea,

And what is more, we want it duty free;
The Russian Bear will soon require our help,
And we must take compassion on the whelp;
The Pope will knuckle to our growing powers,
And strike, omnipotent, his flag to ours:—
Phlegmatic Germany, and Erin dear,
We do not count—for they're already here!

Our aim is lofty, and our object large—
To take the world beneath our special charge;
We'll grow a President with so big a soul
As will not shrink to grasp and guide the whole;
One mighty hand shall hold Creation's purse,
And one strong mind control the universe!

Methinks I hear some listener's voice exclaim,
'Pray what shall be your wondrous empire's name?'
Good friend, the question is superfluous—quite—
The name's already writ in words of light;
No irksome change upon our senses grates,
'Tis but extending these United States!
We'll add fresh stars where'er our bunting flies,
And if they're crowded—we'll enlarge its size!

Some captious cynic here perhaps may ask
If this be poetry. Be mine the task,
From Johnson, Webster, and such delving fry,
To give the anxious caviller reply.
Your lexicon defines the art sublime,
As simple skill in multiplying rhyme:
Let one tall Roman each platoon begin,
While trainband words fall musically in;
Give neighboring lines their just amount of feet.
And thus the definition stands complete.
And now, O doubter! mark my numbers well—
Each dropping syllable on your fingers tell:—
It's all correct—the words fall into place,
And so, Sir Skeptic, I've made out my case!

True, that in poetry there are various grades,
Just as there are in other sorts of trades:—
I'll sketch their outline as they seem to me,
By a poetic sort of Rule of Three.

One writes *immortal* verse, and strives for fame,
That unborn children yet may lisp his name;
Laborious years in grinding toil he spends,
And Life's best energies to the task-work lends;
The midnight taper, paleing into dawn,

Still finds him wakeful, toiling, plodding on;
His work, evolving from a latent gleam,
Grows, till it spreads a deep majestic stream;
Fed by a thousand tributary springs,
At length its volume to the world it flings.

Cheered by the hope that ages yet to come
Will make a shrine of his now humble home;
Blest, that his songs shall triumph and be heard,
And he, in time, become a household word,
When every tongue that glorifies his name,
Shall find therein a synonym for fame;—
He sinks exhausted—all his nerves unstrung,
The very life blood from his being wrung;
His task accomplished, and his brain pumped dry,
The future wonder lays him down to die!

Another class there is, so feeble, dull,
One doubts the contents of each luckless skull;
Their maudlin rhymes the weekly press adorn,
Of tedious, pointless inanition born.
They love their Julias with intensest love,
And brood o'er miseries like a cooing dove;
Their gushing lines come forth to greet the spring,
And with the autumn shivering fancies bring;

From the pale moon their sadness seeks relief,
And wailing winds but aggravate their grief.
The moon, so cold, reminds them of their Jane,
And then, alas! they're agonized with pain:—
Nor cramps, nor colics, nor rheumatic bones,
E'er claimed so many sympathetic groans.
The stars, *so* distant, but alas! *so* bright,
Emblem the Susans that they met last night.
They write, they print, and lovingly they read
Their vapid lines, with edifying greed.
No fond admirer plauds the sickly song,
That trails its morbid impotence along;
Vainly they seek for some 'congenial' mind,
Who to their weakness will be fondly blind;
Until, at last, exhaling in a sigh,
They also pass away. Perhaps they die!

Next comes the poet with the princely dower,
In all the plenitude of conscious power;
He lightly leaps to breast the living age,
Rich gems of genius glowing on his page;
His is the pen that tracks its radiant way,
Where angel pinions in the sunlight play;
His airy muse, elastic in her gait,
Quickens existence, and is all elate.

He stirs the passions and the souls of men,
And prompts to life youth's smouldering fires again :
The eye, swift glancing o'er his brimming lines,
Reflects the light that there in beauty shines :
The rapt ear tingles with the mellow flow
Of crisping thoughts that crackle as they glow ;
The palpitating heart, the kindling brain,
Throb back impulsive to the witching strain.
His aspirations sound the wells of life,
And thought, responsive, bounds to join the strife ;
Electric flashes all our passions sway,
And we press on where'er he leads the way.

The mighty mother bares her breast for him,
And all her charms before his vision swim ;
He feasts on their intoxicating glow,
While soft voluptuous airs around him blow :
Her perfumed breath his teeming fancy warms,
And stirs to action its illusive forms ;
For him her fountains sparkle with delight,
Her hidden paths all open to his sight ;
Fresh from the spring or welling by the stream,
Her rays on him illuminating gleam.

As summer clouds, poised in the rosy glow,
Mirror their tints along the fields below,
So all his thoughts, warmed with the flush of Heaven,
To bathe our souls in holiest light are given.
Mentor and comrade, his the wondrous art,
To make a plaything of the human heart.
Praises, like pearls, fall fast around him now,
And braid the magic wreath to bind his brow.

Such is the life the lifelike poet lives,
Nor takes on trust what future promise gives;
He has no faith in drafts at distant date,
And deems Posterity for its own can wait.

And while I thus my rambling notes prolong,
You ask *my* station in the world of song.
Are you a critic? Some are critics born—
If you are one, tread lightly on my corn!
Pray put me where you please—I'll be content,
So you allow me to pursue my bent.

I love the muses, as I love a flower—
To charm the moment, or beguile the hour.
Sweet to the writer is the voice of praise,
That springs spontaneous up to meet his lays.

A charming word! The end and aim of men
Who wield the goose-quill or the patent pen;
Poetic fervor but for this would fail,
And intellectual fire burn dim and pale;
Ambition would expire for want of food,
And hushed would be the whole enthusiast brood.
Then, if you can, bestow the welcome meed—
Call each a flower that is not quite a weed:
Admit the rhythm, and the easy flow,
Call mild infusion high poetic glow.
And, as our brief acquaintance now must end,
Let your sweet voices in accordance blend;
Don't wait until my living spirit's fled,
To mix me up with the 'illustrious dead!'
Let me enjoy what fairly is my own,
And wield the sceptre from my little throne:
For when the moment comes, as come it must,
That I shall mingle with my parent dust,
When sorrowing friends their last sad conclave hold,
To consecrate with tears my form of mould;
What then to me will be the voice of praise,
Which partial friendship to my manes may raise?
No—let it echo while I'm yet alive!
And as for those who mourn me, and survive,
I'll make them heirs to all my hopes and fears,
And add the wealth of your applauding cheers.

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